



Ke'ena Kuleana Ho'opipa O Hawai'i
1801 Kalākua Avenue
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96815
kelepona tel 808 973 2255
kelepa'i fax 808 973 2253
hawaii tourismauthority.org

**BRANDING STANDING
COMMITTEE MEETING
HAWAII TOURISM AUTHORITY
Wednesday, August 23, 2023, at 1:00 p.m.**

Virtual Meeting

MINUTES OF THE BRANDING STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Dylan Ching (Chair), Mike White (Vice-Chair), David Arakawa, James McCully, Sig Zane

NON-VOTING MEMBERS:

Blaine Miyasato, Mufi Hannemann

HTA STAFF PRESENT:

Kalani Ka'anā'anā, Caroline Anderson, Maka Casson-Fisher, Carole Hagihara

GUESTS:

Lorenzo Campos, Jeffrey Eslinger, Jennifer Gaskin, Jing Jang, Dennis Suo, Eric Takahata, Mitsue Varley, Alexander Wong

LEGAL COUNSEL:

John Cole

1. Call to Order and Opening Protocol

Chair Ching called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. Mr. Casson-Fisher did the opening protocol.

2. Roll Call to Announce Name of Participating Board Members and to Identify Who Else is Present with Board Member if Location is Nonpublic

Mr. Casson-Fisher did the roll call, and all members were confirmed in attendance and were by themselves.

3. Approval of Minutes of the March 29, 2023, Branding Standing Committee Meeting

Mr. White made a motion to approve the minutes and Mr. Arakawa seconded. Mr. Casson-Fisher did the roll call, and the motion passed unanimously.

4. Presentation, Discussion, and/or Action on Existing Branding and Marketing Activities and Development of New Positioning for Short-, Mid- and Long-Term Recovery Branding and Marketing***

Chair Ching introduced the agenda item and asked for suggestions on tackling it.

Mr. Ka'anā'anā reminded the Standing Committee that it was important to consider how the message of recovery marketing would be presented in the short, medium, and long term.

Mr. Miyasato agreed with Mr. Ka'anā'anā's assessment of the task facing the Branding Standing Committee, and pointed out that setting a message would determine branding, which, in turn, would drive marketing. Given that it was now two weeks since the tragic wildfire in West Maui, it was necessary to develop short-term messaging that would lead into the medium and long term. There was an expectation that the Board, and by extension, the HTA, would develop messaging in accordance with its charter relating to tourism in Hawai'i. The media were broadcasting all kinds of stories, but it was the responsibility of the HTA to ensure that the information being disseminated was truthful. This meeting had been called because it seemed better to begin this process with a committee that already existed. It was important that the HTA not only reflect its charter but also stay in tune with the statements and policies of the Governor and the Mayor of Maui, who were the two decision-makers at this time.

Mr. Arakawa pointed out that while messaging, branding, and marketing were important, timing was also vital. Before public messaging and branding could be carried out, protocols and preliminary actions had to be set up, even if these were preceded by internal discussions to consider protocol and timing. He believed that Mr. Zane could give useful guidance on these issues to ensure that the HTA was on a path that would be congruent with decision-makers policies.

Mr. Miyasato agreed that, in the short term, timing was essential. There would be an economic fallout from this tragedy, which was why fundraising events occurred. Appropriate timing would ensure that there was time for proper grieving. The HTA needed a plan that did not imply billboards and advertising. They needed to be sensitive, and marketing would be a mid-term issue, not a short-term issue.

Chair Ching pointed out that while central Maui was open, residents and businesses would need time to adjust.

Mr. Miyasato pointed out that the Governor had been very decisive in his awareness of the economic impact of the tragedy. He appreciated that up to now, the HTA had remained in lockstep with the statements of the Governor. As far as the responsibility of the HTA was concerned, the impact of the tragedy on the tourism industry made this committee the right venue for a discussion about the way forward and whether the statements made by the HTA up to now had been proper and sufficient. The Board needed to consider whether recruiting an outside agency to manage the narrative was necessary. He cited the example of the Japanese, who have had many disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunamis, but on every occasion, after mourning, they bounced back with resilience. It was to be hoped that Hawai'i would follow this example.

Mr. Hannemann thanked the committee for the opportunity to participate as a guest. He agreed that messaging had to be both on-point and sensitive. The Governor's emergency proclamation had made it clear that Hawai'i would not reopen completely before October 17. The HTA had to tread a balancing act between being sensitive to media concerns about the tragedy and responding to the economic realities of tourist industry employees being out of work. The HTA needed to be consistent and keep its policies in line with the two significant decision-makers, the Governor and the Mayor of Maui.

Mr. McCully stated that he understood the media and community concerns. Disaster response was always a process of triage and setting priorities. The HTA should try to obtain input from other communities that have faced tragedy, for example, Las Vegas in the aftermath of the shooting or Puerto Rico in the aftermath of the hurricane. It was possible that these entities would have protocols that would act as templates for Hawai'i.

The members of the Global Market Team were present at the meeting. The Marketing Manager had been conferring with the GMT members every few days so that updated messages could be passed on to their travel partners. For instance, the Canada team had corrected a message given by the Canadian government that Maui was closed.

Mr. McCully asked whether other state tourism agencies published reports or white papers. Mr. Ka'anā'anā responded that although he was unaware of this document, he would forward some relevant links to committee members. Sonoma County had targeted messages to different stakeholders depending on their needs. For example, incentives for group or single properties were different.

Mr. McCully suggested that large corporations such as the post office or the airlines might have crisis management departments whose input would be helpful to Hawai'i. It was important to remain conscious of the complexity and diversity of Hawai'i; while it was a single state, from island to island, there were significant differences, and going forward, there would be a partition between different areas of Maui.

Mr. Hannemann had already reached out to the CEO of MGM Hotels in Las Vegas, the Chair of the Travel Tourism Advisory Board, to ask for any documentation regarding best practices in the aftermath of the tragedy. Mr. White also wondered whether there would be any resource within the American Hotel and Lodging Association. Mr. Hannemann promised to contact them, as well as the U.S. Travel Association.

Mr. Miyasato pointed out that the airline industry, due to years of tragic experiences, had a set of prescribed responses to crises, and the industry as a whole was aware of the importance of an appropriate response to human issues. The cultural aspects of Hawai'i made this even more critical, with priority given to the timing and method of opening up. The HTA was fortunate to have Board members who would ensure that the Hawaiian sense of place and values were integrated into the disaster response in a Pono way. Mr. Miyasato recounted visiting Auntie Maka's command center compound in Lāhainā where various agencies were based. He found the situation very Hawaiian in its inclusivity. He narrated the experience of a worker in the Mayor of Maui's office who had been involved in evacuating tourists to the airport. Many were unwilling to enter the buses provided but responded to the explanation that Hawaiians prided themselves on their hospitality but that the present circumstances did not allow them to host their visitors properly. After this, the visitors had a more positive attitude toward their evacuation, and some donated money to the relief efforts. This story made it clear that policies had to be framed appropriately, Pono, Hawaiian.

Chair Ching inquired how actions would be formed out of the present discussion and whether the Protected Information Group, which began at the last meeting, would be involved in carrying this out. Mr. Arakawa responded that the PIG had met and was in the process of obtaining information. The group was to meet with Mr. Cole to devise the best method of sharing information with the committee and the public.

Mr. Miyasato reiterated his conviction that time was of the essence and that delay would mean missing an opportunity to manage the narrative for the good of the state and the people. He repeated the question of whether recruiting an independent organization was necessary to frame the narrative.

Mr. White pointed out that a distinction had to be made between the opening of West Maui and the opening of the remainder of Maui. It was likely that the opening of different regions would occur at other times.

Chair Ching stated that opening the area north of Lāhainā was a mid-term objective while opening the rest of Maui could be done in the short term. Having visited Lāhainā, and being a native of the area, he understood that the residents' feelings would be different from those of people from other areas, even though gradual progress was being made.

Mr. Zane reminded the meeting that the ten-day Anahulu with the Maui kumu hula coming together had been a valuable period that, through social media, had allowed everyone to participate. The HTA had contacts that enabled them to reach out to residents. However, in the short term, it was important to respect feelings and empathize. Even though there were economic issues, business owners had to be sensitive to the feelings of local residents still searching for their loved ones. Compassion and empathy had to be priorities.

Mr. Miyasato pointed out that up to now, the HTA had been concentrating on conforming to the Governor's official statements, but on the other hand, the Governor looked to the HTA for information and direction in line with HTA's kuleana. The authority had an opportunity to drive messaging in an appropriate direction; it could not continue to carry on business as usual.

Mr. Hannemann concurred with Mr. Miyasato that the HTA's messaging had initially been somewhat shaky, but it was now on point. He gave the example of a hotel in Hana whose occupancy was only 15% and whose workers were 95% from Hana and were concerned about the future of their jobs. For the time being, West Maui was closed, but it was possible for tourism to start to get back to normal in other areas of Maui. During any crisis, there were opportunities to make good decisions, and managing the direction of messaging was a case in point. If the HTA did not make good decisions at present, it was possible that people would ask why the HTA had failed to deliver a clear message in the future.

Mr. White stated that the HTA was trying to craft a message that would not negatively impact the rest of Maui, but this would only be effective if other organizations supported their decisions. The HTA had been involved in writing scripts for the Governor to enable him to understand how the less affected parts of Maui could be opened up.

Mr. Ka'anā'anā stated that the marketing and destination management team had been involved as early as the second emergency proclamation to ensure that the closure message was narrowed to the specific areas affected. He had polled East Maui partners to find out their preferences and had leveraged networks and partners of HTA. The marketing and destination management teams made sure that they were constantly listening and learning. They ensured that the web page was updated continuously and that the alerts page was up to date and linked from other web pages. Industry partners always expected the most recent information, and the HTA was expected to have the best data as a state agency.

Mr. Arakawa thanked Mr. Ka'anā'anā for the work done. At a previous meeting, it had been stated that the HTA "did not belong on the ground right after the incident," but it later became clear that the HTA had to be on the ground. This would be his third disaster since he had been present for the Kaua'i floods and the volcanic eruption. At the time of the Kaua'i floods, there had been complaints that the HTA had not been present on the ground to hear from the visitors, the employees, and local businesses. There had been similar complaints at

the time of the volcanic eruption. From now on, the HTA had to pivot and make sure that they were present on the ground as soon as possible after any disaster. Up to now, our information had been derivative, but now was our opportunity to work with the local community on the ground to craft messages that would comfort and inform.

Chair Ching summarized the feeling of the meeting that the messaging emitted by the HTA had to be different to target different groups of people.

Mr. Miyasato suggested that the media's perception was that the HTA was reacting to circumstances rather than setting out a planned narrative.

Chair Ching again asked whether the meeting felt it necessary to bring in outside resources to manage the messaging appropriately.

Mr. White pointed out that the danger of taking the lead in messaging was to get ahead of the Governor and the Mayor, who were the primary decision-makers.

Mr. Ka'anā'anā and some of the team had been on the ground in Maui since the night of Thursday, August 17, and had been working with the MVCB since the start of the crisis. Over the past week, they had been meeting with community and industry leaders. The team would continue to try to grasp the most appropriate reactions. Although some of this work could be done from O'ahu, much could be done only in Maui, and rotation of the appropriate HTA staff would continue, ensuring that staff would be on hand over the long term. For example, Mr. Ka'anā'anā had connected with local health institutions to ensure that necessary psychological and medical assistance was available. Mr. Nāho'opi'i and Ms. Menor-McNamara ensured NAHA was activated and cultural practitioners were involved in cultural sensitivity training. The destination management and marketing team would provide a weekly "Flash Report" distributed to all Board members to keep them abreast of developments.

Mr. McCully reminded the committee that the HTA Board was a policy-making body, not a micro-management body. The HTA staff were responsible for implementing the policy decisions made by the HTA Board. In the context of this crisis, which was in no way comparable to an issue such as a leak in the roof of the Convention Center, the Board could not second-guess actions being taken on the ground. It was not realistic to expect that the Board could control the narrative, but it was to be hoped that the Board could manage or establish the narrative. At present, the immediate range of resolutions of the Board was Maui and Lāhainā. He emphasized that as far as possible, all messages should lead with positive rather than negative aspects. The task of the Board was to establish a clear policy that the HTA staff could enact.

Mr. Miyasato reinforced this statement by stating that the HTA was to influence, guide, or nurture the narrative to comply with its charter. Mr. McCully noted that to inform, educate, or inspire people, it was always necessary to lead with positive messages. In the face of the present reality of Lāhainā, this was difficult, but it was necessary.

Mr. Hannemann pointed out that the HTA would be justifiably criticized if it brought in an outside agency to craft a message. With twelve experienced and mature Board members and a full, qualified staff, there was no clear reason to hire an outside agency. The message originated from all of us on the Board and the staff. Other like-minded organizations had to be called on to join with the HTA in repeating a well-considered message. The stance of Hawai'i Lodging and Tourism Association was clear. Unlike the pandemic, community leaders and business owners were calling for a balance between taking care of West Maui and those who had lost loved ones and getting employees of tourism businesses back to work where possible. The priority was to care for West Maui, but after this, it was important to open the rest of the state so that people could get back to work.

Mr. Miyasato agreed with Mr. Hannemann and noted that the charter of the PIG was to inventory all available assets and ensure there was a playbook by which to operate going forward.

Mr. Ka'anā'anā stated that he and his team were working to prepare a provisional plan to be made available to Board members 48 hours ahead of the upcoming meeting on August 31. The marketing department had a gifted team of contractors, but the Board would need to consider increasing resources to enable them to get out the message. He pointed out that during the present financial year, the budget for contracts had been much reduced in comparison with pre-pandemic levels or with levels during other crises, such as the Great Recession or 9/11, when budgets had been much higher than at present, not adjusting for inflation or a ten-million-dollar incremental budget that had been added on. It was necessary to consider the resources to be made available to existing contractors.

Mr. Arakawa reiterated that being on the ground was essential to formulate policy. The HTA was gathering information for the Governor to ensure a consistent policy. He suggested that in the case of any future disaster, the HTA staff should be ordered to go to the area concerned. He agreed with Mr. Ka'anā'anā's assertion that the contractors already working with the HTA could formulate messaging.

Mr. McCully suggested that the Board should envisage a rapid response team organized by the HTA staff in the future. Being in the relevant location was essential to allow the staff to make realistic and timely decisions. Mr. Ka'anā'anā informed the committee that the team on the ground had been collecting information. He was grateful for the leadership of Gov. Green and the support of the Tourism Chairs, Sen. DeCoite and Rep. Quinlan, as well as that of Dir. Tokioka. The HTA already had contractors in destination stewardship working on need

assessment. Since this committee was focused on branding, it would concentrate on messaging, while the Permitted Interaction Group and the Ho'okahua Hawai'i Standing Committee would be the best for cultural and community issues.

Mr. Miyasato thanked the committee for the opportunity to be part of their discussion.

Mr. Casson-Fisher reported that a member of the public had suggested that the HTA should reach out to tourism operators to emphasize the importance of being culturally responsible.

Mr. McCully proposed the motion to adjourn, which was seconded and carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 2:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Sheillane Reyes

Recorder